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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

18 March 1970

"E" MEMORANDUM NO. 1-70 (O/NE Distribution Only)

SUBJECT: Ecology and Environment: The Agency's Role

1. Since World War II the concept of US national security has been defined primarily in terms of defense against the Soviet Union and international communism. More recently, China and the possible spread of Chinese communism have also become part of the national security equation. The intensity of belief about the threat is revealed in many ways -- especially in the existence of expensive and varied governmental and private organizations whose job it has been to defend us with men and hardware, or to wargame or anticipate the magnitude of losses which we could tolerate in a nuclear conflagration. Indeed the very existence of this Agency is itself a reflection of our main postwar concern.

2. As an agency, our first mission has been to gain information about Soviet (and Chinese) hostile intentions toward the

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US. Our second mission has been to detect (and if possible to check) the spread of communism and those political movements which might abet the communist cause wherever they might be found and regardless of their peculiar local character. Reporting and analysis flowed naturally from the main obligations of the Agency, so that the magnitude of the threat at any given time, or changes in its character, could be known or reasonably anticipated by the highest officials and policies protective of US interests could be developed.

3. As a country and as an Agency we have generally done our job well, even though at times we have tried so hard that our efforts have been counterproductive. And to be sure, neither we nor the rest of the non-communist world proved as vulnerable as we originally had thought. It now seems unlikely the Soviet or Chinese influence in the world will expand significantly or soon, even though in some areas our own influence may decline considerably in the years ahead. There is a strong predilection in many countries to use the tensions between the great powers to their own benefit, rather than to let themselves be formed into "camps" led by one or another of the great powers. And we have learned that the superpowers have many similar problems and interests --

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some even held in common -- which can transcend their specialized anxieties. Interest in big-power diplomacy, at least on the well-worn life-death issues of the nuclear age, seems keen at the moment; the phenomenon of inertia and trends of the times seem to make of movement toward war-like militancy unlikely.

4. But this apparent victory for reason, and the conventional way in which we have defined our national concerns, have diverted our attention from what may have been the real battle all along. It now seems clear that whatever the threat to the US has seemed to be, it is no longer military or ideological alone. A real threat is posed by that vast and complicated new worry: how to maintain a viable US society -- the quality of life -- in a degraded environmental and ecological system.

5. As described by students of ecology, the threat is of a magnitude unknown in world history -- especially for the US because we are at one and the same time the largest consumers of the world's resources / ^{and} the largest polluters of the planet. Because of our advanced stage of technological and socio-political development, we should have these problems in control, or in much better control. But while we have actively worried

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about the more conventional threat to our society, and tried to inspire imitation of our own way of life, we have grossly neglected the condition of the earth and of man's relationship to its resources. And our will and capacity to consume not only threatens us (as the leading consumer and smug creator of the "best" life) but it also threatens the rest of the world. It is in the world context that the problems must ultimately be resolved.

6. We do not have the option of ignoring or postponing consideration of the problem -- and we have but little time to study it. It is, after all, the genius of history which has got us where we are; we can hardly expect that same happenstance to solve the problems it has created. In taking action to reverse the clock -- promoting population control programs, agricultural reforms, exploitation of the oceans' resources, and other programs necessary merely to preserve the current conditions of life in the world -- the US will implicitly be admitting that each child born in the United States poses a greater threat to ecological balance than a child born anywhere else. If this realization spreads, it may have great impact upon other countries whose economies and socio-political systems are based upon support for US consumption or are in other ways affected by it.

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7. If the past is prologue, on this problem as on others, the US will be expected to provide answers and programs for the world -- both by our own citizens who have infinite faith in our technological capabilities and by a world which expects us to take on any "impossible" task. But the US will fail if it operates alone. We can probably "sell" the problem and the need for international co-operation better than anyone else, but we cannot implement courses of action in alien cultures. Indeed, the biggest part of the problem may be to get the consumption-oriented waste-producing US society to alter its own life style enough to serve both itself and posterity.

8. Other nations, however, will undoubtedly expect the US to make the greatest (relative) sacrifices for the common weal. For reasons other than purely ecological ones they might even hope for a decline in the US standard of living relative to their own. They might even restrict -- for ecological as well as political reasons -- the resources they make available to the US. While such restrictions might now appear unlikely and irrational in economic terms, this need not always be so, especially if political and psychological disapproval of the US were superimposed upon world-wide alarm about population pressures, economic and social problems, and ecological deterioration.

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9. The only reasonable way to address the problem of ecology and environment is to establish useful parameters within which to work -- to choose a path between the Cassandras (we hope they are) and the optimists (we're sure they are). The Agency, and this office, need not be without a role in confronting this problem. There are "watch reports" and warnings of a new kind to be prepared; the analytical staffs of this agency are well-qualified to handle the data. For example, we can comment with some authority on the relationship of population to food supplies and arable land, and upon the likely meaning for the US and other countries as the relationship becomes unbalanced in a particular country or region. We can report on and estimate the likelihood that other nations will take the decisions necessary to preserve their own environments, and anticipate their reactions to any changes in US consumption patterns -- for instance our petroleum, steel, or copper consumption. We already pay attention to tensions arising over the definition of the limits of the territorial seas -- the major point of dispute with dissident nations being their asserted rights to the resources of the ocean outside the limits subscribed to by the superpowers. We could also report on such matters as the availability of fresh

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water worldwide, on the quality of the atmosphere and the nature of changes in it, and on the likelihood that other nations will extend and protect these resources by available scientific means. The list of possible studies is vast, and in many cases our work could be based mainly on data already in hand.

10. In short, if US concern about the quality of life is likely to force domestic decisions about what we can afford to do without, or how we must alter the ways in which we live our lives, such decisions will undoubtedly affect others in the world, as well. We could make better decisions if we understood both their likely impact abroad and the degree to which other nations and regional economic groupings will be similarly concerned. Through estimates, studies, and memoranda, the intelligence community could make a strong contribution toward an understanding of the problem in its broadest frame of reference.

Ecologus

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